



How Will Obama's Election Affect Race and Intolerance in Westport?"

December 9, 2008

Discussion Notes

Opening Comments

Welcome from TEAM Westport Chair Harold Bailey

Remarks and statistics from David L. Levinson, Ph.D, President, Norwalk Community College

Moderator: Judith Hamer, Ph.D:

Principles of an "Open Space" meeting:

- Whoever comes is the right people
- Whatever happens is the only thing that could happen
- Whenever it starts is the right time
- When it ends, it's over

and The Law of Two Feet: Everyone has two feet; be prepared to use them.

For more on TEAM Westport, see www.teamwestport.org

For more on the process we used, see www.openspaceworld.com.

What Might Happen Next?

- Consider how to continue the conversation here in our community
- Consider staying involved and involving others by joining Friends of TEAM Westport



Small Group Discussion Notes

Group A – Combined two topics: Can I raise a black (or other minority) child in a town with as little diversity as Westport? and How might we ensure exposure to diversity for our children (and what barriers must we overcome in this community)?

- “Diversity” has a broad meaning and includes many things, e.g., race, religion, sexual orientation, culture, etc.
- As parents of children who are “different”, we work hard to seek diverse experiences for our children.
- Some of us have experienced that minority families in this community may not want to associate and prefer to assimilate instead of standing apart.
- Children are encouraged to learn about cultural heroes in their own cultures.
- It’s important to teach teachers about cultural sensitivity and stereotypes

Group B – How might we overcome the cost of living in Westport as a barrier to diversity and multiculturalism? What can we do to welcome those in straitened circumstances to afford Westport?

- There is little affordable housing in Westport. What are the barriers?
- What has the Town done to work toward the State-recommended 10% level of housing that is “affordable”?
- Perception – a key point. People outside Westport often stereotype Westporters in a certain way.
- We don’t see much diversity in Westport – on the Town web site, on streets, in polls, in schools.
- Why do more people from diverse cultures choose to move to Darien and Greenwich rather than Westport?
- Young people can’t afford to live here. Neither can many municipal employees.
- McMansions create an aura of wealth and exclusivity, intentionally or not.



Group B (cont'd)

- What would help affordability:
 - support affordable housing initiatives
 - create a more welcoming perception: via website, downtown businesses, library, town government

Group C – How do we educate our youth so they are not blinded by prejudice and stereotypes?

- kids learn stereotypes at home
- contact with different “others” and peers sets lifetime attitudes, particularly when reinforced by parents
- need to teach the value of diversity. Teaching techniques exist to do this
- value of contact with “different others” when the contact is positive rather than negative
- expectations stem from interracial contact
- use “teachable moments” to overcome early childhood training to worry about or not trust “different others”
- don’t blame others for your frustrations or scapegoat them to relieve your spleen

NB – the following topics were proposed but not discussed:

1. Now that I have voted for Obama (first time voting Democratic in my life!), what is the future for me and for my town?
2. What is next for the black and white youth in this country after Obama mobilized them and demonstrated that a minority can be successful?
3. Disparate treatment for black and white youth: by law enforcement, in the judicial system and in the correction system.
4. How can we keep the energy from this last election going and make it more inclusive and diverse?